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**BOOK OF ABSTRACTS – RESÚMENES – RESUMOS**

# **GENDER, WORK AND ORGANIZATION**

A (de)colonial view beyond the borders  
Una mirada (de)colonial trascendiendo fronteras  
Uma visão (de)colonial para além das fronteiras



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## **1. Becoming a Masseur at the Place Called the Spa; A Narrative Analysis of the Lives of Masseuses in the Geographic Context of Sri Lanka**

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This study attempts to provide some space in the academic arena for a category of women in Sri Lanka who have largely been neglected from academic and feminist care, perhaps because of the socially dubious nature of the organizational spaces that they inhabit and widely held beliefs about the immoral nature of the occupation that they perform in such spaces. Inclined by this motive, this paper re-narrates the life stories and trajectories of women who perform the role of the masseuse at the 'places called spas' in the geographic context of Sri Lanka. According to Doreen Massey's relational approach to space, space could be understood as a network of social interactions that occur in a particular spatio-temporality. The place called the spa in Sri Lanka has its specificities produced through relational effects of the social, cultural, economic, and political particularities in the locale and the beyond. The spas exist as legitimate organizational entities in Sri Lanka which seemingly provides authentic spa related services for health-massage seeking people. Yet, in the ongoing process of producing the place called the spa in the locale, its services are profoundly connoted with sex work rather than bodywork. This perplexing association in praxis, tend to recognize masseuses' occupation as immoral and disreputable. Against this backdrop, the masseuses in the local context are having a stigmatized identity and are extremely vulnerable to social degradation and oppression while being exposed to exploitation and violence by the spa owners as well as the clients of spas. Yet, spas seem to be an alluring place of work for rural young women—the migrants from the remote locations to the city— and socio-economically alienated single mothers.

This study explores the underlying causes behind such attraction, based on twenty-five narrative interviews with women who enact the role of the masseuse in the spas located generally in highly urban milieus of Sri Lanka. Delving into masseuses' life narratives reveals three causes that influence women to become a masseuse in the

local specificity. Mainly, becoming a masseuse is a constrained choice rather than an informed choice taken with a strong desire to be a masseuse. Structural conditions of poverty act as a major push factor, while demonstrating that the inability of the feminized labour roles created in the Global South countries by the neo-liberal economic globalization have become unable to bring the promised prosperity to the lives of socio-economically disadvantaged women in such localities. Such conditions have influenced women to perceive spas as a fruitful economic geography which fulfil their life aspirations. Moreover, the intensely rooted socio-cultural values inscribed by the patriarchal ideology on 'feminine respectability' influence rural young women to be identified as 'defamatory characters' and compel them to become masseuses. Also, the women's subjugated and inferior position in the patriarchal family institution makes single mothers vulnerable to choose sex-labour roles that emerge in spas. The voices of masseuses reflect that they are seeking a space of respect and care in a social context in which they are highly stigmatized and alienated.